

HANGER AND BACKCARD FOR PACKAGES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

- [1] The invention relates to a backcard, and more particularly, to a backcard attachable to a package and having a hanging feature and an information feature.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

- [2] Containers or "kits" for food products often include a base with several compartments, each containing a separate food product. For instance, one compartment may contain cheese intended to be spread on crackers contained in a second compartment. A third compartment may include cookies or a dessert item intended to be consumed separately from the cheese and crackers.
- [3] These types of containers often have molded plastic or polymeric material forming the compartments. The containers are constructed such that the compartments form walls separating the food products. The food products are placed in the compartments, and a cover is applied to the compartments. The cover is sealed to the walls so that each food product is isolated from the environment outside of the container and is isolated from each other food product.
- [4] The cover is often intended to be the front or top of the package, and may be at least partially clear so that some or all of the food products are substantially visible. This enables a potential purchaser or consumer to examine the package and readily view some of the contents of the container.
- [5] In addition, the cover may be used to display pertinent information regarding the food product. The cover may present information such as ingredients, a trade or retail name, a manufacturer name, instructions for using and combining the package contents, and other information that is either desirable from a marketing perspective

or required from a legal standpoint. Backcards are often used to provide nutritional facts, lists of ingredients, bar codes, and other information.

- [6] Commercial food containers generally must be capable of inexpensive manufacture. The amount of material for the container should be limited to reduce cost. In addition, economical manufacturing processes for the container are preferred.
- [7] Retail food containers or packages should be easy to open and use properly. Although some of the food product in the compartments may be relatively secure, such as cheese spread, some of the food product may be loose, such as crackers or sprinkles for a dessert item. When the cover and seal are peeled open, the base portion of the container may be flexed by the pulling of the cover. This may lead to spillage during peeling or after the peeling force is released by the separation of the cover from the base if the package is not sufficiently rigid.
- [8] Retail display of these packages has intertwined aesthetic and functional aspects. Generally, the packages are intended to be attractive to customers, and in some cases, as noted above, the packages permit a potential purchaser to view the contents. Some packages are displayed on shelves, on end with the cover at the front of the display to be readily visible to the consumer. In other instances, packages are hung from a rod or peg, again with the cover facing forward. In both cases, features generally must be provided to enable the packages to be supported in the desired orientation, while also enabling the packages to be formed, filled and sealed economically in commercial mass production.

It is known to have merchandise display hangers that are adhesively attached to video cassettes or the like and have a fold-out hanging portion with an aperture therein for hanging on a rod or hook, as disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,328,137 and 4,832,301. The hanging portion is centrally located in the flat hanger sheet and occupies a very substantial portion of the hanger body. In the hanger of U.S. Patent No. 5,328,137, an

opening or gap is provided in the bottom edge to facilitate grasping of the lower end of the fold-out, hanging portion. This gap extends throughout the height of the bottom section to the bottom edge of the fold-out, hanging portion. When the fold out hanging portion is grasped and swung upwardly and out of the plane of the body, two legs are left on the body. The legs and a small strip on the inner side of the hanger body are available for adhering the hanger body to the video cassette, but cover only a top portion of the video cassette, and hence do not function as a backcard nor as a large surface area for bearing indicia.

SUMMARY

- [9] In accordance with an embodiment of the invention, there is provided a new and improved backcard and a new and improved combination of a backcard and a food container having a hanging feature and a substantial informational area for receiving and/or having indicia thereon relating to the food product in the container. This is achieved by a backcard that has a hanging feature that is provided in an upper portion of the backcard and a lower half of the card being substantially without holes therein and bearing informational indicia related to the food product. The preferred embodiment comprises an inner layer or ply that is adhered to the container and an outer layer or ply having the hanging feature and bearing the indicia.
- [10] In one embodiment, the two layers are substantially rectangular in shape and have a hanging feature which is pulled out of the plane of the outer ply adjacent an upper edge of the backcard and pivoted upwardly about a fold line adjacent the upper edge of the card with the portion of the outer layer therebelow being planar and without any substantial voids or holes and bearing printed indicia describing the contents of the food products.
- [11] In accordance with a further embodiment, a tear strip is formed in the outer ply and is tearable to provide access to the interior of the backcard. By tearing the strip, access may be had to indicia related to prizes or coupons.

- [12] In an exemplary embodiment, a plastic container is provided with separate compartments, each containing a food product therein with the separated bases of the compartments being adhesively joined to the backcard and with a cover sheet adhered to the container to cover the food access openings to the respective compartments. The cover sheet may have transparent portions allowing viewing of the food products in the container and some area for having graphics including printed indicia identifying the food product. The hanging backcard may have a large area, for example, 50% or more, which is available for graphics including printing relating to contents of the container, bar codes, etc. The container may be laid flat with the hanging feature remaining within the plane of the backcard, or the hanging feature may be pulled from the plane of the backcard along weakened lines to fold it upwardly for attachment to a hanger rod or hook.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [13] Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a plurality of packages utilizing an embodiment of the invention;
- [14] Fig. 2 is a fragmentary side elevation view of the package of Fig. 1;
- [15] Fig. 3 is a rear elevation view of the backcard of Fig. 1;
- [16] Fig. 4 is a rear elevation view a second embodiment;
- [17] Fig. 5 is a fragmentary rear elevation view of the backcard of Fig. 3;
- [18] Fig. 6 is a cross-section taken along line 6-6 of Fig. 3;
- [19] Fig. 7 is an enlarged fragmentary cross-section corresponding to Fig. 6;
- [20] Fig. 8 is a cross-section taken along line 8-8 of Fig. 5;

- [21] Fig. 9 is a rear elevation view of the package of Fig. 1, without the backcard;
- [22] Fig. 10 is a rear elevation view of a further embodiment;
- [23] Fig. 11 is a perspective view of the backcard of Fig. 10 with the removable portion partially removed; and
- [24] Fig. 12 is a representation of a manufacturing process for securing backcards to packages.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

- [25] Referring initially to Fig. 1, a series of hanging packages 10 are depicted hanging from a rod 12 used for the display of products in a store. Each package 10 is hung from the rod 12 with a backcard 20. The backcard 20 is secured, preferably by an adhesive such as glue, to the back 22 of the hanging package 10 (see Fig. 9). As depicted, the preferred backcard 20 is generally rectangular in shape, though it may be of any shape such as square, oval, polygonal, or circular.
- [26] The hanging packages 10 preferably used with the backcard 20 are multi-compartment packages for storing different food items that a user may eat separately or may combine prior to eating. The back 22 of the package 10 has an irregular shape due to the shape of the compartments 24. As can be seen in Fig. 9, glue lines 26 are made across a plurality of the compartments 24, and the backcard 20 is secured using these glue lines 26. Alternatively, the backcard 20 may be provided with adhesive lines, and the backcard 20 may then be applied to the package 10. A greater degree of precision may be required with securing the package 10 and backcard 20 in this manner. As a further alternative, one side of the backcard 20 may be entirely covered with adhesive or glue.

- [27] While it may be difficult to print information on the back 22 of the package 10, utilization of the backcard 20 allows information to be easily placed on the back of the package 10 by printing information on the backcard 20 and gluing it to the package 10. The front 30 of the package 10 may comprise clear cellophane or the like so that the contents are easily discerned by a consumer. By placing information on the backcard 20, the front 30 of the package 10 is not cluttered with this information and the contents of the package 10 are minimally obscured.
- [28] In accordance with a preferred embodiment, the backcard 20 functions not only to hang the product, but also to provide a large, contiguous area for printed information or indicia 21 such as a list of nutritional facts 22 on the left side of the backcard, a list of ingredients 23 in a column on the right side of the backcard, a bar code 24, and a date 25 at the bottom of the backcard, as depicted in Fig. 4. Thus, there is provided a combined backcard 20 and hanger card for hanging the product and for displaying the ingredients, nutritional facts, etc. for the product. Manifestly, the indicia 21 may vary substantially from that described above by way of example. The entire lower portion of the card is substantially without holes or voids that would interfere with the printing of the indicia 21. Preferably, the hanging feature or tab uses only a small upper end or portion of the backcard so that a major portion of the outer surface of the backcard is available for printing of indicia. In the illustrated embodiment, the hanging feature comprises less than 1/3 of the backcard area, and may, for example, comprise about 10%-20% thereof.
- [29] The preferred backcard 20 is a two-ply or two sheet card. As can be seen in Figs. 3-8, the backcard 20 has a substrate layer 34 and an outer layer 36. The substrate layer 34 receives the glue that secures the backcard 20 to the package 10, as can be seen in Fig. 2. The outer layer 36 is the layer that preferably receives the information that is to be displayed to the consumer as it is the visible layer and as it generally covers the substrate layer 34.

- [30] A hanging feature 40 is provided near the upper end of the backcard 20. The hanging feature 40 includes a finger hole 42, a pair of scores or perforated lines 44, a crease or fold line 46, and a punch hole 48, all in the outer layer 36 only, together forming tab 50. A user may insert a finger or other object into the finger hole 42 to engage the tab 50. The tab 50 is then pulled, causing separation of the perforation lines 44 and folding of the fold line 46. Thus, the tab 50 may be extended as is shown in Fig. 5. A principal utility of the perforated lines 44 is to mechanically hold the tab 50 in a recessed and non-extended position such as depicted in Fig. 7, a result that may also be achieved by utilizing a peelable adhesive or other means for holding the tab 50 in such position. Although shown offset from a top edge 52 of the backcard 20 in Fig. 3, the tab 50 may also be located so that the top edge 52 and fold line 46 are coincident, as can be seen in Fig. 4. The backcard 20 may also be a single-ply or single sheet card, in which case the glue lines 26 between the backcard 20 and the package 10 should be located such that the operation of the hanging feature 40 is not retarded or prevented.
- [31] Referring to Fig. 6, the two-ply backcard 20 is depicted with the tab 50 in a non-extended position. The arrow in Fig. 7 depicts the direction in which the tab 50 is to be moved to the extended position, as is shown in Fig. 8. By utilizing a tab 50 and hanging feature 40 in this manner, the backcard 20 and package 10 may be conveyed in a manufacturing setting, shipped in cases, and displayed at retail without protrusions to interfere with these activities. It is only through the retailer deciding that the tab 50 is to be used that the tab 50 is extended. In the event the retailer displays the packages 10 on a shelf, the tab 50 may remain in its original position, wherein the hang tab 40 does not protrude beyond the surrounding backcard material. This enables the packages to be arranged stably in a stack without interference from the hanging feature.

- [32] As shown in Figs. 4 and 5, information such as promotional information may be printed on one or more of the inner and outer surfaces of the hang tab 50, and/or on the portion of substrate layer 34 that is exposed when the tab 50 is pulled up.
- [33] As an alternative to or in conjunction with one of the above-described embodiments, a surface 64 of the substrate layer 34 (see Fig. 11) may be exposed when a portion 70 of the outer layer 36 is partially or completely removed. Referring to Fig. 10, the outer layer 36 is shown with score lines 62. The score lines 62 are located in a position so that their use does not interfere with the operation of the hanging feature 40. In Fig. 11, the portion 70 of the outer layer 36 bounded by the score lines 62 is shown partially removed. The portion 70 may have information printed on the surface 72 such that the information is only visible when the portion 70 is partially or completely removed. Such information may be related to a prize or sweepstakes and/or to a coupon's legal disclosure information, for instance. The surface 64 may also contain information. In other embodiments, the entirety of the outer layer 36 may be folded up, such as along the top edge 52, to expose the entirety of the substrate layer 34.
- [34] The printed backcards 20 may be secured to the package 10 by a method and apparatus as shown in Fig. 12. A supply 100 of backcards 20 is provided adjacent a vacuum roller 102. The packages 10 may be advanced continuously at a constant speed or otherwise along a conveyor 104 so that the packages 10 pass under a glue supply 106 and then under the spinning roller 102 so that a backcard 20 is placed on the glue. The glue supply 106 can provide glue lines 26, at selected locations on the compartments 24.
- [35] In a preferred embodiment, the backcard 20 is made from Solid Bleach Sulfate (SBS) paper. Although any weight of paper could be used, 8 lb. paper is preferred such that the two layers of the backcard 20 are equivalent to 16 lb. paper. Stiffness generally decreases if the backcard 20 is lower than equivalent of 16 lb., while greater than 16 lb. may unacceptably increase the cost of the backcard 20. The backcard 20 may

include a coating of polypropylene providing additional strength. Alternatively, the backcard 20 may include a coating of a ultraviolet (UV) varnish, or acrylic, or a layer of ink, each of which may contribute properties to protect the product contained in the package, to protect the packaging itself, or to improve or protect the printing of the indicia on the backcard 20. For instance, printing is usually placed on a coated side of the paper.

- [36] The coating on the backcard 20 further has a role in the above-described manufacturing process. The process includes applying backcards 20 to packages 10 at a rate of approximately 300 per minute. In order for this rate to be maintained, the backcards 20 need to remain somewhat flat. Specifically, curling of the backcard 20 by as little as $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch may reduce the rate at which the cards can reliably be picked up by suction or otherwise handled. Curling in one form is a result of moisture content and absorption, more precisely an imbalance of moisture content between two portions of the card. Moisture can be introduced through the environment of the backcard 20, or through a process such as application of adhesive to one or more layers of the backcard to secure it to the package or to secure the layers to each other. Curling may result from one side or one layer of the backcard 20 absorbing more water than the other side or layer absorbs. The presence of the coating may retard moisture absorption, thereby causing an uncoated side to have a greater absorption and the card to have a concomitant curling. Though paper coated on both sides may be used, this may add additional cost to the backcard 20. However, the coating on the backcard 20 may also be used to control curling. For instance, applying adhesive only to a coated side of the paper may result in less moisture absorption than application of adhesive to an uncoated side.

- [37] Curling is believed to be a result of moisture absorption by the fibers of the paper stock of the backcard 20. As they absorb water or moisture, the fibers swell. When the fibers of a first layer or ply swell more than those of a second layer, the first layer becomes larger than the second layer to which it is secured, thereby causing curl. For

any particular fiber with a length much greater than its width or girth, the swelling may cause expansion in relation to the fiber's dimensions such that the fiber lengthens more than it widens. For the manufacturing process discussed above, curling in the backcard 20 in the lateral directions may be a greater problem than curling in the longitudinal direction. As the majority of the paper stock fibers are aligned with the paper's machine direction, curling in the lateral direction may be reduced by having the machine direction aligned with the longitudinal direction of the backcard 20.

- [38] Preferably, the outer edges 90 of the backcard 20 (Fig. 3) do not extend beyond the outer edges 92 (Fig. 9) of the package 10. The height 94 of the backcard 20, when secured, should be such that an extended tab 50 may be placed on a peg or rod 12 (see Fig. 1) while the package 10 has clearance below the rod 12. The bottom 96 of the backcard 20 is preferably even with the bottom edge 98 of the package 10 so that the package 10, with the backcard 20, may be placed on an even surface (not shown) and stood upright.
- [39] The backcard 20 may be applied to the package 10 before or after contents are placed in the compartments 24. The contents are placed in the compartments 24 prior to applying the front cover 30, which may be made of a heat sealable laminated polymeric material, cellophane, or other suitable material. Adding the backcard 20 before the contents are added and before the front 30 is secured may provide advantages relating to mechanical and/or thermal stability.
- [40] While the invention has been described with respect to specific examples including presently preferred modes of carrying out the invention, those skilled in the art will appreciate that there are numerous variations and permutations of the above described systems and techniques that fall within the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims.